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ABSTRACT

The vast amount of literature on curriculum and instructional design does not establish a clear frame of reference to help teachers utilize and operationalize concepts and information. Four specific problem areas are of special concern in the literature: (1) the terminology and definitions are confusing; (2) the place of the classroom teacher is at best vague; (3) component elements are overemphasized without reference to the total process; and (4) the mechanical and impersonal nature of the methodology is distracting. Guidelines to help teachers overcome these problems in the literature must seek to establish a perspective regarding curriculum tasks, deal with their complexities in a manageable fashion, and establish a developmental set for continuous experience and growth in instructional design. (DS)

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The Teacher as Instructional Designer: A Search Through the Curriculum Maze

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Most artifacts of curriculum activities are found in the classroom: lesson plans, unit plans, course outlines, curriculum guides, commercially-designed instructional materials, as well as notes on the backs of envelopes. That the classroom teacher is directly involved in curriculum development of one kind or another is fairly clear. We had hoped to help classroom teachers execute their role as instructional designers by synthesizing a frame of reference concerning curriculum and instructional design from which a set of functions or competencies could be generated. But our notion that a "frame of reference" was out there in the literature was, we discovered, unfounded. When we turned to the literature on curriculum and instructional design, we found ourselves in the midst of an incredible maze.

The Curriculum Maze

At the center of the maze is that traditional notion: "Many theorists have not only exhorted curriculum developers to structure their curricula, but have identified factors (such as) "_____." One might fill in the blank with numerous examples of "factors" the curriculum developers are "exhorted" to take into account as they plan. Most of the literature consists of information and concepts theorists deem useful to the developer and attempts to help the developer operationalize this extensive knowledge. However, more often than not, the role of the reader in relationship to the given information is not clear and readers are left with the task of locating themselves. Thus, the maze.

The maze is an intricate network of ideas, terms, methodologies,

and research in education which have some implication for curriculum activities. We will not attempt to "sort out" the maze, but rather to articulate four critical concerns which surfaced as the authors made their way through the literature. The four areas of concern were 1) terminology and definition, 2) nature of the audience, 3) little reference to the total process, and 4) the seemingly mechanical nature of the systems approach.

Terminology and Definition

Terminology and definitions in the literature are confusing, in part, because the reader is not certain whether a term is used in the context of discussion as a concept, a process, a set of principles, or a product, and more importantly--what the significance is of making such a distinction. The authors initially assumed, for instance, that there would be a fairly clearcut distinction in the literature between the terms "curriculum" and "instructional design." We had hoped to explore such a distinction in this paper. However, we found definitions which confused the two terms or conflicted from author to author. Hyman suggests simply that curriculum deals with the question, "What shall I teach?"[1] Posner says a curriculum "consists of a series of intended learning outcomes (ILO's) organized into some structural arrangement."[2] Yet, in planning and implementing instruction. Corey states that one must formulate "a description of behaviors intended to be the outcomes or objectives of instruction."[3] Is Corey talking about curriculum or instructional design or instruction? Corey continues by defining "the process of instruc-

tion" as "sequenced instructional stimuli that are designed to achieve the sought behaviors."[4] Although Corey's article is entitled "Definition of Instructional Design," the term itself is never used in the article! We continued our search, confused and bewildered.

A closer look at the literature does little to reduce the confusion. We found that curriculum may be approached as a concept so general that it can range from an individual unit to major ideas.[5] We also found it described as a process (Hosford, Posner, Johnson), as was instructional design. At the same time, the notion of both curriculum and instructional design imply tangible products. When distinctions in the educational literature are not made between concepts, processes, and products, teachers are hampered in sorting out their role in the curriculum planning process.

Nature of the Audience

Taken as a whole, however, the educational literature does not consistently assign the role of "instructional designer" to teachers; instead, it places the teacher at various points along a continuum of non-involvement. Gow states that "No single teacher, coping with a class of students, no matter how perceptive and skilled she might be, could possibly create the kind of adaptive educational environment which instructional technology makes feasible."[6] Merrill is a bit more optimistic when he comments that "School teachers represent one potential type of instructional designer."[7] On the other hand, Hosford insists that the onus of bridging the gap between instructional strategies and innovations studied in empiri-

cal settings and their on-going use in the classroom rests -- with the teacher.[8] Moreover, a large portion of the educational literature directs itself to the educational theorist, the educational researcher, and the educational developer of curricular materials for use by teachers in predesigned programs. This literature emphasizes theoretical procedures and their empirical verification. The place of the classroom teacher in this type of educational literature is, at best, vague.

The Total Process

Anyone who turns to education literature for the resources or "tools" useful in planning, developing, and evaluating curricular products and materials will find numerous sources and bibliographies detailing information about: diagnosis, structure, scope and sequence of subject matter, behavioral objectives, learning hierarchies, instructional methods, media, strategies, and evaluation. However, this literature is fragmented, often overemphasizing component elements as separate entities without reference to the total process. The fledging instructional designer must struggle to relate the components to a larger framework of a design.

The Systems Approach

The "instructional systems" approach is a useful method to help those involved in curricular activities conceptualize a curriculum development model. Such an approach puts the component parts together by systematically relating one to the other. The inpersonal, sometimes mechanical nature of the methodology can cause problems. One difficuly is in seeing oneself as a component

in a system. Systems components are often described as follows:

> In education we have human components, such as the learner, teacher, counselor; media such as books, and audio-visual equipment; facilities, such as classrooms and playgrounds; and other material and financial means.[9]

The mention of "human" components in a parallel structure with the materials and facilities can produce a startling effect. Although a further description suggests that "having in mind the learning of specific skills, knowledge and attitudes as the purpose of education will require us to make learning itself the key process after which the learner becomes the component around which all other components are organized,[10] the human ego is wanting to distinguish its identity, somehow from the inanimate world.

Even a brief journey through the Curriculum Maze leaves the wanderer even more aware of the complexities involved in the design process. However bewildering the maze, the fact remains that teachers do engage in curriculum activities, do make curricular decisions and do develop curricular products implemented in the educational setting. They are . . . instructional designers.

Teacher as Instructional Designer

For the most part, it is the classroom teacher in the public schools who is directly involved in curriculum development. Curriculum tasks may vary from one school to another at any given time. Some schools alternate the activities of grades and departments within a system so that they might stagger the financial expense of new materials and teacher time. Yet, teachers are often expected to work together on curriculum matters. A brief list of

current curriculum activities might include the following people and tasks:

1. A teacher designing lesson plans for her particular grade or content area.

2. A teacher contributing to a team effort in designing instructional units for a department curriculum.

3. A teacher working with a curriculum team to write educational goals and a philosophy for a school system.

4. A teacher on a curriculum team writing a rationale for a specific instructional unit.

5. A teacher, as a team member, developing criteria in order to evaluate a commercially-designed instructional program.

6. A curriculum co-ordinator planning and facilitating the tasks of the teachers in order to develop a school-wide curriculum.

7. A media specialist providing resources to teachers for a mutually developed instructional design.

8. A principal initiating and facilitating teachers' tasks in order to write educational goals.

Curriculum development reflects clearly that people are engaged in activities, making decisions, and developing products. Further, curriculum writing and revising has become a complex process. It implies clusters of highly sophisticated and interrelated competencies which, by their very nature, must be considered developmental and various. That is, there are no expected competencies which will insure skill in curriculum development, but rather an emerging sense of competence as one practices curriculum decision-making, instructional designing and evaluation and participating on curriculum development teams.

At the outset, however, a perspective regarding the extensive-

ness of the tasks and their complexities would aid teachers in both managing the tasks and establishing a developmental set for continuous experience and growth. The lists below represent an attempt to articulate this perspective by reflecting what teachers as instructional designers are expected to do.

Suggestions for Curriculum Decision-Making

This set of tasks addresses itself to decisions regarding what is to be taught and why. These tasks require that participants be able to point to a clear process by which curriculum goals have been generated.

- Determine a working and mutually-acceptable definition of "curriculum", which participants can "live with".
- Identify contemporary social forces (sexism, racism, consumerism, etc.) which affect curriculum decisions.
- Examine the assumptions underlying these social forces.
- List the areas of concern to be included in a rationale for a particular curriculum.
- Specify curriculum goals, drawing from the above as a basis for developing and choosing those particular goals.
- Determine a clear educational philosophy reflected by the curriculum decisions.

Suggestions for Instructional Designing and Evaluation

Once the goals have been established, the next step is to determine the nature, type, content and extent of the materials which will best achieve the stated goals. This set of tasks reflects those considerations.

- Determine a working and mutually-acceptable definition of "instructional design".
- Determine the specific nature of the product(s) to be worked on i.e., individual material, units, teacher guides, courses of study, etc.

- Develop clear reasons why the intended instructional design best meets the goals.
- Identify the specific components as you see them and their relationship to the instructional design being developed.
- Identify available resources and information as they relate to the components, i.e., behavioral objectives, instructional materials, evaluation strategies, etc.
- Generate an instructional unit in which the components clearly relate to one another.
- Develop criteria for evaluation the instructional design.
- Evaluate the instructional design based on the criteria developed.

Suggestions for Participating on a Curriculum Development Team

When groups of teachers work in a team situation, they need to examine how they as individual team members might best work effectively together. Such an examination gives structure to the group process and insures that the group functions productively, both individually and collectively.

- Identify specifically one's own role and functions on the team.
- Help each participant identify the role and function he/she might assume.
- Articulate the basic assumptions one uses to make curriculum decisions.
- Identify in the group the assumptions which are similar and those which are different among members.
- Set team goals based on assessment of individual skills and external needs.
- Develop and specify individual tasks as they relate to the product(s).
- Monitor the group process in order to make careful decisions about practical concerns--time and resource limitations, resolution of conflicts of interest, etc.

These suggestions are not sacrosanct. Their purpose is to help people "make sense" out of the roles and tasks involved in developing

curriculum materials. In fact, their purpose would be served if the people involved in the curriculum tasks revise the suggestions to meet their own needs and situations. Given the difficulties and confusion of the Curriculum Maze, it seems reasonable that the designers themselves identify the basic considerations which they feel able to address. With experience a sense of competence emerges, which in turn enables the designer to explore more closely the complex gestalt of curriculum and instructional design.

Notes

1. Ronald T. Hyman, (ed.) Approaches in Curriculum, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973, p. 3.

2. George J. Posner, "The Extensiveness of Curriculum Structure: A Conceptual Scheme," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 44, Fall, 1974, p. 401.

3. Stephen M. Corey, "The Nature of Instruction," in M. David Merrill, Instructional Design: Readings, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971, p. 9.

4. Ibid.

5. Posner, p. 402

6. Doris Trayon Gow, Design and Development of Curricular Materials, University of Pittsburgh, 1974, Vol. 1, p. 7.

7. M. David Merrill (ed.) Instructional Design: Readings, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971, p. 1.

8. Philip Hosford, An Instructional Theory: A Beginning, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 90.

9. Bela H. Banathy, Instructional Systems, Belmont, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1968, p. 87.

10. Ibid, p. 86.